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Indochina

A. China/Vietnam

MAP

1. Chinese attack into Vietnam which began 17 February culminated with fall of Lang Son on 2 March; on 5 March Chinese forces ordered to pull back into their own territory.

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- Perhaps 130,000 men actually took part in fighting inside Vietnam (approx. 12 divisions) with remainder just across border
- Magnitude of Chinese effort evident from fact that until 24 December only forces Chinese had along VN border were numerically small local units.
- We estimate Vietnamese initially had 40-50,000 men along border, but VN forces were augmented as fighting progressed.

2. Size and nature of Chinese build-up and political signals  
[redacted] on need to "punish" Vietnam convinced us beforehand that attack was likely, and we issued warning memorandum on 14 February.

3. Chinese had several objectives in mind:

- As just noted, ostensible purpose was to "punish" VN

for alleged "provocations" along Sino-VN border (incursions, armed attacks against people and property).

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-- However, more fundamental (but unstated) purpose was to demonstrate to Vietnamese that China would not permit them to intrude with impunity into areas of SEA of vital concern to China, e.g., Kampuchea. In wake of VN invasion of Kampuchea, China wanted to show it was not a "paper tiger".

-- China's offensive also intended to show USSR that it cannot get away with using Vietnamese as Soviet surrogates in SEA in way that Cubans have been employed in Africa and Middle East.

25X1 -- [REDACTED] in a wider context China wanted to make point to the US that the way to respond to Soviet "hegemonism" and activities of Soviet-backed Cubans is not to be passive but to react with force.

-- At same time, Chinese did not desire a prolonged conflict. At beginning of attack they said fighting was to be limited both in extent and duration, and that Chinese forces would be withdrawn since Vietnam had been taught a lesson.

° We foresaw Chinese goals might indeed be limited and speculated in 14 Feb warning memo that fighting might not last beyond several weeks, and would not extend to attacks on Hanoi.

- ° Chinese clearly were considering international opinion - with Vietnam widely blamed for invading and occupying Kampuchea, they did not wish to be put in same position.

- ° They also wished to keep scale of hostilities below threshold which would compel Soviets to intervene in support of Vietnam.

4. Invasion began at dawn on 17th and Chinese attacked virtually every town, village, and military position along entire 1300 km frontier..



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5. Initial major Chinese military objective was destruction of Vietnamese provincial forces defending border region.

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6. Second major objective was to inflict significant casualties *on VN main force units. (5 divisions)*. Units defending Hanoi were initially not committed, but later some elements were sent into combat.
  7. Third major objective was to ease pressure on Kampuchean resistance by forcing Hanoi to recall some combat forces from that region.  
-- This purpose also accomplished to some extent.
  8. Lang Son became major set-piece battle following Chinese capture of Dong Dang.

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-- Accordingly, Chinese capture of Lang Son and defeat of VN main force units was, in fact, a significant victory even if in scale it was less than Chinese had hoped.

- Once this accomplished Chinese announced withdrawal to their side of "historically recognized border" would commence as of 5 March.
- 9. Chinese withdrawal underway, with only sporadic interference by Vietnamese.
  - Chinese concentrating just across VN border, notably N of Dong Dang, and could attack again at any time.
  - They could also counterattack if Vietnamese significantly attempt interfere with Chinese pull-back.
- 10. Both sides claimed victory following Chinese withdrawal announcement, but circumstances of fighting and subsequent developments indicate that Chinese probably came out on top.
  - At least 2 VN main force divisions together with other main force elements and provincial units chewed up by Chinese, who claim 15-17,000 VN soldiers killed and 1000-1500 captured. (Chinese losses were also substantial, but Chinese armed forces far outnumber Vietnamese, and can better afford such losses.)
  - VN Ambassador in France told newspaper reporter that "Vietnam has suffered losses that were "quite important in terms of military and civilian losses as well as in terms of material."
  - Despite Chinese withdrawal announcement, VN continued nation-wide mobilization and began to shift additional forces to Chinese border from Laos and from deep in

Kampuchea. As many as 30,000 troops moved from Kampuchea; 2 divisions from Laos.

- ° Removal of troops from Kampuchea (which continues despite Chinese withdrawal) should considerably improve prospects of Kampuchean resistance.
  - ° Draw-down of VN forces in Laos has created concern in Hanoi (and among Soviets as well) that China may now attempt to support anti-government elements in Laos.
  - Contrary to situation prior to VN invasion of Kampuchea, Vietnamese now must be prepared for Chinese attack at any time, and must maintain large numbers of main force troops along Sino-VN border against this contingency.
  - In sum, Vietnam now stretched thin militarily, aware that it cannot afford to ignore threat of Chinese attack in any further moves it makes in SEA despite Friendship and Cooperation Treaty with the Soviets, and confronted with heightened domestic economic and political difficulties.
11. Advantages not wholly to Chinese, however, since Soviet role in VN enhanced as a result of the fighting.
- VN now receiving additional quantities of Soviet military aid, including MIG-21s and SA-3s.

- Soviets may have gained access for their naval vessels to VN ports. Soviet naval ships are now at Danang, and have called at Ho Chi Minh City and Haiphong. No such visits occurred prior to Chinese attack. Soviet transport aircraft also providing VN with internal airlift.
- In event of renewed fighting, Soviets may feel compelled to react more forcefully than in this instance.
- Vietnamese will nevertheless probably try to keep Soviet role from becoming too great, e.g., by holding back on granting full base rights for Soviet air and naval units.

B Kampucheans continue stiff resistance in countryside

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1. Fighting throughout the country, particularly in the SW.
  2. VN re-supply effort hampered -- roads trenched, bridges destroyed.
  3. Quick VN thrust took major towns and roads but did not destroy Kampuchean forces. Pol Pot believed operating near Battambang.

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- Difficulties thereby increased for VN forces remaining in Kampuchea.
  - Kampuchean forces may even be regrouping into division-size combat units.
5. Chinese apparently managing to get supplies to Kampucheans via Thailand. Kampucheans also appear to have cached ample supplies of food, weapons, and ammunition.
  6. If Kampuchean resistance can hold out until rainy season arrives in May-June, odds favoring Vietnamese will be considerably reduced and prospects improved for establishment of viable anti-VN political structure.
    - However, Pol Pot regime resented by Kampuchean people, who apparently support him either because they hate the Vietnamese more or because they fear reprisals if they cooperate with VN.
  7. Sihanouk in Peking, where Chinese may use him to head a new "coalition government" more acceptable to Kampuchean and world opinion than Pol Pot.
    - Problem for Chinese is that Sihanouk refusing to work with Pol Pot.

C. Soviet Role

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1. Soviets watched with concern:



2. Ten or more Soviet naval vessels moved to South China Sea: 3 surface warships including command/control cruiser, one alligator-class amphibious landing ship, 2 AGI's, 2 survey ships, 2 oilers.



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3. Soviet officials warned in non-specific terms of possible Soviet retaliation if Chinese went "too far."

- However, Moscow careful not to commit itself in advance to any course of action.
- Recent speeches by senior Soviet leaders including Brezhnev have not gone beyond demanding that Chinese withdraw from VN; Brezhnev suggested that early conclusion of SALT agreement with US outweighed considerations favoring Soviet intervention -- at least under present circumstances.

- Soviets now congratulating themselves for their "statesmanship" in not being sucked into direct involvement by the Chinese.
- No military augmentations on Sino/Soviet border,



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#### 4. Soviet Options

- Consultations (under November 78 Treaty). Chief of Soviet Foreign Ministry SEA Division visited Hanoi recently to discuss "problems of common concern".
- Conspicuous military aid, possibly including "volunteer" fighter pilots.
  - Soviet cargo aircraft carrying military supplies now flying regularly to Hanoi -- at least 12 such flights.
- Naval show of force in Vietnam area; presence at Haiphong, Cam Ranh Bay, or Danang.
  - Five or six ships called at Danang in week beginning 4 March. Possible Haiphong also port of call. (Naval vessels never visited Vietnam before.)

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-- Military pressure against or across Soviet border  
with China.

5. Chinese feared air attack in NW China

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6. Balance in North favors Soviets who could move with little  
or no warning.

Sino/  
Soviet  
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- Soviets - 44 divisions (500,000 men).
  - Chinese - 98 divisions (1,700,000 men).
  - Soviets - 12,000 tanks.
  - Chinese - 4,500 tanks.
  - Soviets - 2,250 aircraft.
  - Chinese - 2,700 aircraft, but less capable.
7. Soviet reaction related nature and severity of Chinese move  
against VN.
- Clearly wished to avoid protracted ground engage-  
ment in China.
  - However, Chinese saw some risk of Soviet attack,  
sent some reinforcements north and moved back civilian  
population in NE as well as NW. Chinese probably  
watching unusual Soviet local movements adjacent to  
NE China very closely.

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China-VN-USSR Triangle and US Policy

I. Might begin by assessing how each protagonist stands in relation to Indochina situation.

a. Vietnam

-- Vietnamese are the big losers. They are accepted as aggressors in Kampuchea; "hegemonists" throughout Indochina; find themselves over-extended militarily and in near-distress economically. Every ASEAN country regards them as principal threat to individual and regional stability.

b. Soviet Union

-- Although Sovs receive some credit, esp. in Europe, for avoiding direct involvement in Sino-VN fighting and hence threatening detente, they suffer in Asian eyes both from close identification with Vietnam and failing to provide sufficient aid to their Vietnamese ally. Their naval and air presence in Vietnam unwelcome to the very Asian countries Sovs are now trying to influence. Chinese charges of Soviet "hegemonism" appear credible.

c. China

-- Chinese gained the limited political and military objectives they sought in attacking VN: demonstrating to Asians they are not a "paper tiger", making VN realize

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that Chinese attack cannot be discounted if VN intrudes into Chinese areas of concern, and showing that Soviets cannot be counted upon to fully back up an ally.

-- Chinese may initially have been criticized for attacking VN but effect greatly reduced by Chinese withdrawal.

II. Short-term Policies each country will likely follow

a. Vietnam

-- Vietnamese will probably continue doing what they are doing; continuing and stepping up military effort against Kampucheans, *despite free money to North* ~~trying to form Indochinese confederation to include Laos~~ <sup>(points II, a, b, c)</sup>, pressing Soviets for material assistance.

-- VN unlikely, however, to want "big brother" relationship with Sovs, and will probably try to restrict physical Soviet presence in VN, e.g., via base rights.

-- VN also moving to complicated and possibly preempt another Chinese attack by opening negotiations with Beijing. Talks also would serve purpose of keeping lines open to Chinese and avoiding over-commitment to Soviet relationship.

-- Some chance VN will attempt to supplement Soviet aid with assistance from other sources, e.g., Japan, and undertake political efforts to put itself in better light with Asian and western countries.

b. China

-- Chinese will maintain military forces along VN border sufficient to outnumber Vietnamese by substantial margin.

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This will tie down VN main forces under threat of another Chinese attack.

-- Beijing will attempt to use talks with VN to inject issues of Kampuchea and Laos, and particularly keep world attention focused on VN occupation of Kampuchea.

-- Concurrently Chinese will do everything they can to sustain Kampuchean resistance and may also attempt to stir up resistance forces in Laos. Purpose will be to maximize military and economic strains on VN.

-- Chinese may also explore ways to activate Sihanouk in Kampuchean "united front", which will necessitate eliminating Pol Pot or at least pushing him into background.

### III. Longer-term Outlook

#### a. Vietnam

-- Possibility exists that if Kampuchea continues to be running sore for Hanoi and difficulties increase elsewhere such as in Laos, VN may modify its Kampuchean policy and accept something less than it originally desired, for example a "united front" which might contain other elements besides Heng Samrin.

-- They might also turn more closely to Soviets, but this would have disadvantage of making VN appear to be a Soviet puppet and would be contradictory to strong Vietnamese nationalism.

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b. Soviets

-- Soviets aware that they are criticized for supporting VN (even India is against VN invasion of Kampuchea) and downgrading role of ASEAN. Kriangsak's Moscow visit may have strengthened this perception. They may thus wish to reduce somewhat their close identification with VN.

-- To this end they may be willing to support a "coalition government" in Kampuchea even before Hanoi does, and accept Sihanouk in it if he can be removed from Beijing.



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-- The Soviets may in addition act cautiously in displaying their military presence in VN.

-- Sovs may well want to move VN toward a political settlement (favorable, of course, to Hanoi) but must act cautiously so as not to compromise relationship with Hanoi.

IV. Development of Next Stage and Relationship to U.S. Policy

a. Most desirable outcome of situation from standpoint of VN's Asian neighbors would be neutralized Kampuchea and a VN which was neither an active threat to their stability nor a servant of Soviet interests. Such an outcome would also serve U.S. purposes.

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b. Way to get there would be for VN to realize that its most ambitious objectives cannot be realized, and accept something less. U.S. can help by:

-- Continuing to urge potential non-Communist aid donors to cut back on economic assistance to Vietnam. (There are those such as Japan who might argue that their aid would help to keep VN from turning entirely to the Soviets and preserve some degree of non-Communist influence on Hanoi's policy. History would argue, though, that any help to VN would only serve to make it believe that it will eventually get what it wants if it waits long enough--this is the route which Hanoi has followed successfully in the past.)

-- Bolstering the will and capability of the ASEAN countries to continue to stand up against Soviet and Vietnamese pressures.

-- Keeping the Kampuchean issue before world attention in the UN and in other convenient arenas.